Resources for Successful Superintendents

Idaho State Department of Education

Involved in the Academic Business of Schools

Successful superintendents believe that they must not only understand, but be directly and deeply involved in the academic business of their schools (in addition to, but above and beyond the managerial side of things). Instruction is not left to chance. They believe that strong practices in the Instructional Core (Elmore, 2008) form the foundation for the success of their students. Thus, they seek to ensure that classroom instruction is strong by monitoring teaching and learning across their entire system, and when they find areas that need improvement, they put robust approaches to professional development in place to improve upon any area of concern. First, they set district wide expectations for a strong instructional framework (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices). Second, they actively monitor teaching and learning to evaluate if their expectations are being met. Third, they view professional development as an implementation tool for teaching new expectations or correcting poor performance.

Strong Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

Monitoring, Teaching & Learning

Professional Development as a Multifaceted Tool

Strong Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Superintendents that overcome the odds indicate that they work toward having all curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in their districts based as solidly as possible on some type of valid research. Elmore (2008) described these three components as the Instructional Core, or the "relationship of the student and the teacher in the presence of content".

They believe that by having a strong Instructional Core in all classrooms, this will form the foundation for the success of their students. In their own ways, superintendents made it clear that the Instructional Core is an important component of their vision for improvement. Decisions about it are usually intentional, based on educational research, and implemented throughout the district.
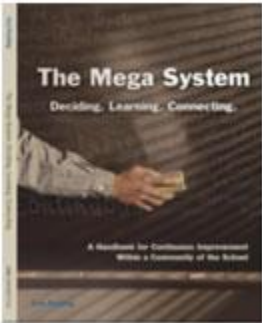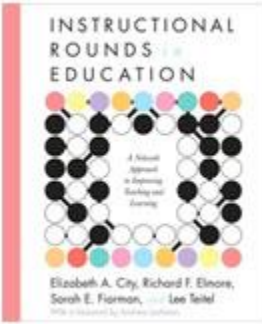
Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IB07	The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include research-based, field-proven programs, practices, and models.	CLICK HERE
IA09	The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.	CLICK HERE
IB02	The district examines existing school improvement strategies being implemented across the district and determines their value, expanding, modifying, and culling as evidence suggests.	CLICK HERE
IC02	The district designates a central office contact person for the school, and that person maintains close communication with the school and an interest in its progress.	CLICK HERE
IC03	District and school decision makers meet at least twice a month to discuss the school's progress.	CLICK HERE
IC05	The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular	CLICK HERE

	expectation on the school.	

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

	The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting. (Redding, 2006) For a concise overview of how superintendents might view the connections of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Sam Redding's The Mega System is an excellent resource. Formatted as a short handbook, chapter 3 provides an excellent overview of what is entailed in ensuring students are learning. Available for free download from the author at http://www.centerii.org/survey/.
	Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning (City et al., 2009) City et al. describe Richard Elmore's concept of the Instructional Core in their highly regarded book on Instructional Rounds in Education. This book provides an in-depth look at how leaders can define problems of practice related to the Instructional Core along with strategies they can use to continuously evaluate and improve decision-making as it relates back to teaching and learning.

Monitoring, Teaching & Learning

The importance of the Instructional Core is also demonstrated among successful superintendents in the ways in which they actively monitor the teaching and learning that occurs in each of their schools. These instructional leaders institute such practices through a combination of methods, but primarily through classroom observations that are non-evaluative.

In some cases, superintendents monitor the quality of instruction using their own observation process. Such superintendent observations are not connected to formal teacher evaluation, but inform decisions about the system. Others use informal observation processes to check in on the quality of their system. While still others use structured tools in order to describe, quantify, and make decisions based on the data from their observations.

In addition to their own observation strategies, high impact superintendents rely on the regular supervision process of their principals by expecting them to regularly check in on the quality of the Instructional Core. The ability to provide instructional leadership through observation techniques is a strategy seen by effective superintendents as a particularly important, non-negotiable characteristic of an effective principal. Such superintendents know that when their building leaders demonstrate the ability to effectively monitor good teaching and learning, it actually allows them to focus on the more abstract, higher level leadership functions of their work and not worry as much about the minute details.

The idea of being in classrooms observing the Instructional Core is a clear principle that successful superintendents value. They make it a priority to deprivatize practice in all of their classrooms through observation. They see each class as part of the larger system; and to improve the whole, they monitor the quality of the most basic part ? the classroom.
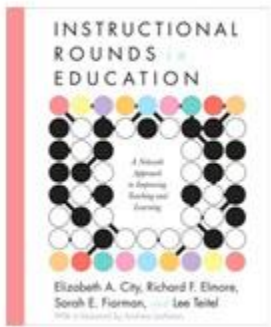
Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA06	The district provides schools with technology, training, and support for integrated data collection, reporting, and analysis systems.	⚐ CLICK HERE ↗
IA07	The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets.	⚐ CLICK HERE ↗
IA11	The district ensures that key pieces of user-friendly data are available in a timely fashion at the district, school, and classroom levels.	⚐ CLICK HERE ↗

IB02	The district examines existing school improvement strategies being implemented across the district and determines their value, expanding, modifying, and culling as evidence suggests.	⬇ CLICK HERE ↗
IC01	The school reports and documents its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent reports the school's progress to the school board.	⬇ CLICK HERE ↗

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS EDUCATION — A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning — Elizabeth A. City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman, and Lee Teitel (With a foreword by Andrew Lachman)	Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning (City et al., 2009) One of the most powerful tools that leaders use to monitor teaching and learning is Instructional Rounds. Modeled after Medical Rounds, this process uses non-evaluative observation that guides leadership and decision-making about the system. City et al. provide a framework for instituting the Instructional Rounds process based on a well articulated Theory of Action paired with a cycle of inquiry that helps leaders determine why anticipated results are not occurring. For more information, visit Harvard Graduate School of Education's Usable Knowledge site on the topic at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/blog/uk/2009/05/treating-the-instructional-core-education-rounds.html
Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools — A research-based resource for schools and districts to assist with improving student learning	Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) The authors describe the practice of monitoring teaching and learning in this way. "Effective monitoring is non-threatening and occurs frequently. In other words, monitoring provides continuous feedback primarily for purposes of improvement, not for making major decisions about a student's future or a teacher's career." Chapter 6 of this resource provides information on how strong leaders might connect the data produced by student performance to that which comes from leadership observation

	practices.
	This document is available for free download from the State of Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction at:http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/ninecharacteristics.pdf

Professional Development as a Multifaceted Tool

Superintendents that are focused on and accomplish improvement throughout their systems often view professional development (PD) as a tool that can both prepare for the successful implementation of new innovations and correct existing implementation practices that are poor. They generally work to deliver PD through more than just workshops. They use methods such as job-embedded instructional coaching, collaboration meetings, peer observation, and the Danielson Framework for Teaching model as a formative process.

Peer observation stands out as a promising practice to deprivatize practice and spur collaborative professional growth. Often, peer observation is not seen by leaders as a viable option because of the difficulties involved with coordinating time out of the classroom, the potential awkwardness between peers, and various other challenges. However, peer observation can be a powerful tool to advance improvement efforts because, in essence, it centers teacher collaboration on the refinement of their own actual teaching practices. Peer observation stands out to some superintendents as not only possible, but is seen as a natural way of moving professional conversation forward. Its importance was shown in that many superintendents encourage their principals to stand in for teachers to free them up to observe, and, in some smaller rural settings, superintendents themselves are even willing to fill in for a teacher to make peer observation possible.

Regardless of the model for professional development, in districts with strong leadership in the superintendent's role, its purpose is always intentional. It is not viewed as a choose-your-own-adventure plan. It is purposeful, either to meet a pre-defined goal or to correct and improve performance in relation to a pre-defined standard for high quality instruction.

Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

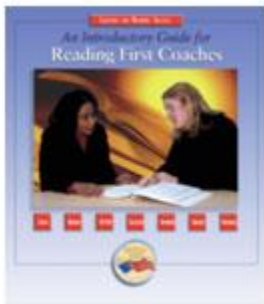| IA14	The district recruits, trains, supports, and places personnel to competently address the problems of schools in need of improvement.	⬇ CLICK HERE ↗
IC08	Staff development is built into the schedule for support staff (e.g., aides, clerks, custodians, cooks) as well as classroom teachers.	⬇ CLICK HERE ↗

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

	Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn (DuFour et al., 2004) In the well known book, Whatever It Takes, DuFour et al. outline how professional learning communities can leverage the power of collective knowledge to engage in learning processes that will in turn improve the system. Professional development thus becomes defined in many ways as collective learning and problem solving. This book is an excellent resource for leaders who are thinking about how to turn dysfunctional collaboration meetings into a teaming process that truly focuses on how the community responds to students who are struggling.
	An Introductory Guide for Reading First Coaches (National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance, 2005) Instructional Coaching is a process used by many districts. While this guide is a product of Reading First, its principles are transferable to many aspects of instructional coaching. It includes a description of what coaching is and what it is not, as well a research on why coaching is an effective practice. It is available for free download from the US Department of Education at: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/support/coaches.pdf.
The Phi Delta Kappan (no image available)	**Fusing Lesson Study and Authentic Achievement: A Model for Teacher Collaboration (Stewart & Brendefur, 2005)** In this article published by professors of education here in Idaho, the authors identify a strategy that combines focused lesson study processes, including peer observation, with authentic instruction. This is one of many models that superintendents might encourage within their schools.

School Improvement as a Collective Endeavor

Superintendents who lead their systems toward larger scale improvement describe the work of school and district improvement as a collective endeavor which is not limited to just the people on staff within their organizations, but something which extends to the community, local businesses, and other external groups. They believe that relationships are a critical component of the change process and intentionally build positive rapport. Yet, even though they view the work as collective and strive to move forward together with others, they have a strong sense of personal responsibility. When the system succeeds, they see this as a something in which everyone had a contribution. When it struggles, they view it as a personal challenge and blame no one but themselves.

- [Relationships, The Driver of Change](#)

- [Collective Response to Accountability](#)

- [The Resource of Public Opinion](#)

Relationships, The Driver of Change

Superintendents that are impactful see relationships as the foundation of what drives change and improvement. Relationships, whether between students and teachers, principals and teachers, themselves and principals, or the staff and community, are seen as tremendously important. This is because they build intrinsic accountability among everyone and create an environment that supports learning due to the fact that people feel respected and see themselves as critical to the improvement process. The various successes such superintendents' districts achieve are intentionally used to support positive relational dynamics and, in turn, help them move to the next area in which they see a need to improve.

The converse of positive relationships, when poor attention is given to relationship development, is seen as a reason for why innovations fail to succeed. Personal commitment ends up being lacking from the people who matter most to the implementation side of a decision. Adept superintendents see it as no surprise when decisions fail under such conditions, because the people involved did not feel respected or valued in the decision-making process.

Because of this belief in collective efficacy, skilled superintendents intentionally build positive relationships within both the organization and the community at large because they believe it is an essential part of making sustainable decisions that are likely to succeed. They find ways to work with the surrounding community and develop business partnerships. Most will intentionally meet with external stakeholder groups and develop partnerships centered on the academic well-being of their schools. This approach also folds into how they attentively foster a healthy dynamic between themselves and the elected representatives of the community, the Board of Trustees. A supportive, collaborative relationship with the Board is found to be essential. By cultivating a solid, ongoing relationship with their Trustees, successful superintendents feel empowered to do the hard work of improvement.

Results orients superintendents thus view relationships as a foundational piece to the improvement process. Strong relationships make change possible because trust becomes inherently ingrained within the system. From the students knowing their teachers care about them personally, to the district leader with the supportive Board of Trustees, the relationships become the "grease that drives change" when challenging issues or tough decisions are faced.
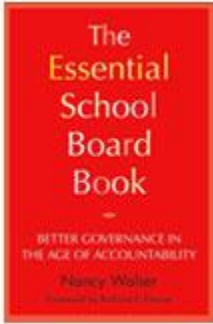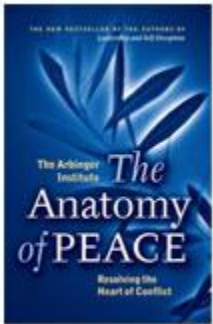
Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA01	The district includes municipal and civic leaders in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	CLICK HERE ↗

IA02	The district includes community organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IA03	The district includes parent organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB11	The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include "quick wins," early successes in improvement.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB12	The district is prepared for setbacks, resistance, and obstacles on the path to substantial improvement.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

The Essential School Board Book	**The Essential School Board Book** (Walser, 2009) The book is an excellent resource for School Board Trustees. It focuses on the policies and procedures boards can utilize to enhance student achievement. Superintendents sometimes report that they serve in a coaching role to board members; this book would be a logical companion to that type of partnership.
The Anatomy of PEACE	**The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict** (The Arbinger Institute, 2008) The Anatomy of Peace is a book that many educational leaders in Idaho have read over the past few years, many of whom cite it as helpful for being mindful of the human element of change. Change often involves decisions that create conflict. This book may be helpful in keeping the peace during the difficult work of continuous improvement.

	Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, &am; Davies, 2007) The importance of engaging parents in the academic improvement decision-making process is becoming more and more apparent in the research literature. Beyond the Bake Sale is a well regarded resource for how to move from more peripheral functions that parents often play to essential partnerships that lead schools to greater success.
	The Parent Involvement Analysis (PIA) Tool The PIA Tool is available from the same team at the Academic Development Institute (ADI) who created the WISE Tool. ADI is the home to the National Center on Innovation and Improvement (CII). The PIA Tool is free and provides both an online process for rethinking parent involvement in schools as well as many other free, downloadable resources such as those in Beyond the Bake Sale by Anne Henderson et al. To access the PIA Tool you can either visit the State's Parent Involvement webpage or go directly to ADI at http://www.families-schools.org/PIAindex.htm.
	The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting. (Redding, 2006) For an overview of how superintendents might deepen their schools' community and relationship, Sam Redding's The Mega System is an excellent resource. Formatted as a short handbook, chapter 4 on "The School as Community" provides excellent examples related particularly to school-family connections. Available for free download from the author at http://www.centerii.org/survey/.

Collective Response to Accountability

Superintendents capable of influencing change intentionally utilize collaboration at multiple levels to foster collective thinking and a collective response to continuous improvement. Collaboration occurs not just in the traditional sense of teacher collaboration, but is also apparent in the ways in which they work with their district office staff, their principals, and their communities. Rather than being autocratic decision-makers about key aspects of the improvement process, such superintendents either plan collectively with a district leadership team or, at minimum, gather staff input in some manner.

Interestingly, this attitude endeavoring collectively often shows up in the nuances of a superintendent's speech patterns. They often use first person plural language, such as we, us, and our. This in some ways demonstrates that they truly believe the work is a collaborative balance between their roles and that of others. As one Idaho superintendent put it, by demonstrating openness to communication, input, and collaborative problem solving, this sense of togetherness "creates an environment where we're all accountable for each other's success."
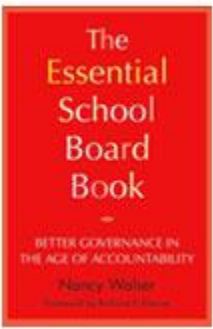
Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA08	The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IA09	The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB01	The district operates with district-level and school-level improvement teams.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB09	The district ensures that an empowered change agent (typically the principal) is appointed to head each restructuring school.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB10	In restructuring schools, the district ensures that the change agent (typically the principal) is skilled in motivating staff and the community, communicating clear	⬆CLICK HERE ↗

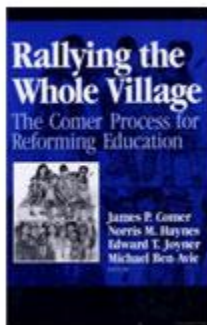|	expectations, and focusing on improved student learning.	
IB12	The district is prepared for setbacks, resistance, and obstacles on the path to substantial improvement.	⬆CLICK HERE ☑
IC01	The school reports and documents its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent reports the school?s progress to the school board.	⬆CLICK HERE ☑
IC02	The district designates a central office contact person for the school, and that person maintains close communication with the school and an interest in its progress.	⬆CLICK HERE ☑
IC03	District and school decision makers meet at least twice a month to discuss the school's progress.	⬆CLICK HERE ☑

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	The Center for Educational Effectiveness [The Center for Educational Effectiveness](#) (CEE) provides incredibly powerful survey tools and data analytics to help each level of a school district better understand perceptions that exist among leaders, staff, students, and parents. CEE has been a partner with the Idaho Building Capacity Project for a number of years now. District and school leaders report that the surveys and reports inform crucial decision-making processes related to organizational trust and collective efficacy. The data collected are explicitly linked backed to the framework for improvement used in Idaho: *The Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools. If you are looking for a way to balance academic assessment data with valid and reliable perceptual data, consider the tools available through CEE as a possibility.*
	Rallying the Whole Village: The Comer Process for Reforming Education (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996) In *Rallying the Whole Village*, James Comer offers a view of education that is very different from the traditional system. Based on the old proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child," this book suggests a model for academic improvement that utilizes numerous members of a larger community in order to meet the needs of all learners. If you are interested in reading something that will challenge conventional thinking, consider the ideas set forth by Comer.

The Resource of Public Opinion

Public opinion outside of the bounds of a superintendent's staff members is seen as an important source of accountability and support for the task of continuous improvement. Effective superintendents see these opinions represented in and through their Board of Trustees, their local businesses and government structures (e.g. city council, local state representatives, etc.), as well as their students' families. They view such opinions as sources of information that have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes. On the one hand, public opinion brings accountability for high quality programs. Yet, on the other hand, when the positive relationships described above are in place, this external accountability can be leveraged to gain necessary support for change and can serve to rally necessary resources that may be needed.

Adept superintendents harness positive public opinion in order to leverage multiple kinds of support related to anything from financial needs (e.g., grants, donations, and passage of bonds and levies) to academic concerns (e.g., attendance and dropout rates, school curriculum design, and input on perceived effectiveness). When seen in the positive light of good relationships, well equipped superintendents are able to capitalize on the strength of public opinion and leverage it as a tool for improvement.

Connections & Resources

IA01	The district includes municipal and civic leaders in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IA02	The district includes community organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IA03	The district includes parent organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IA08	The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗

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IBCEE (no image available)	**Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence** The Idaho Business Coalition for Education Excellence (IBCEE) is an organization in Idaho that is interested in large scale academic improvement. Strategic, results-oriented superintendents often partner with business and civic leaders around common goals. If you are interested in finding ways to partner with local business, consider some of the resources and programs available through IBCEE. Learn more at http://www.ibcee.org/default.aspx.

A Superintendent's Primary Responsibility

While the successful superintendents see the managerial components of their work as critical to the success of their districts, they view their ultimate role as being leaders who are responsible for the academic success of all students in their district. They are driven by a deeper moral purpose to ensure that all students are successful, whatever it takes, but they recognize that it will require the continuous improvement of a very complex system. To move forward in decisions related to continuous improvement, such leaders utilize research and external partnerships. Furthermore, they focus their efforts on effective leadership within their buildings and have high performance expectations of every teacher and principal.

- [Continuous Improvement in a Mega-System](#)

- [Resources for Decision Making](#)

- [High Expectations](#)

- [Deeper Moral Purpose](#)

Continuous Improvement in a Mega-System

Superintendents that are effective are driven to ensure that all students succeed. And, all means all. But, they do not limit their definition of student success to just what is measured by the state test (ISAT). While they maintain goals for the state tests, such as IRI and ISAT, they actually measure students' success and progress, or rather the success of their system in many different ways. For example, one measure of success is found in high school ACT and AP exam score comparisons. A commonality among high achieving superintendents is that they define success primarily in terms of preparing kids for life beyond their systems. They value graduation rates, college placement, college readiness (i.e., not needing remediation), and college completion, with their greatest goal being that each student graduates and is prepared for whatever choice he or she wants to make beyond 12th grade (e.g., college, technical school, etc.). This might quite simply be described as seeing not a K-12 system, but rather a 12-K system. Highly effective superintendent seek to graduate kids from grade 12 and, in turn, map the system backward from that end goal. This focus on the end goal was demonstrated by an emphasis on graduation.

Because of the fact that they define achievement in relation to long term goals and by using more than just the state test, skilled superintendents see their school districts as complex systems and use data sources that are both formal (e.g., academic tests, college placement) and informal (e.g., community data, people's input, etc.) to evaluate how well their systems are working. They view the improvement process as continuous and make adjustments as needed. When they see a component of their system that is not adequately preparing students for post-secondary life or which could be improved upon, they respond by continuously refining their practices in order to "chase the lodestar of student success" (Redding, 2006).
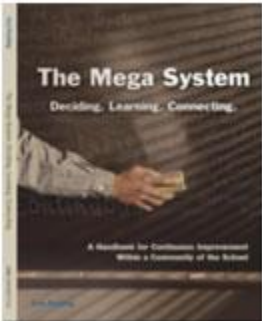
Connections & Resources

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IA07	The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets.	⤓CLICK HERE ↗
IA08	The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement.	⤓CLICK HERE ↗
IA11	The district ensures that key pieces of user-friendly data are available in a timely fashion at the district, school, and classroom levels.	⤓CLICK HERE ↗

IA12	The district intervenes early when a school is not making adequate progress.	⬇CLICK HERE ↗
IA13	The district works with the school to provide early and intensive intervention for students not making progress.	⬇CLICK HERE ↗
IB01	The district operates with district-level and school-level improvement teams.	⬇CLICK HERE ↗
IB02	The district examines existing school improvement strategies being implemented across the district and determines their value, expanding, modifying, and culling as evidence suggests.	⬇CLICK HERE ↗
IC05	The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular expectation on the school.	⬇CLICK HERE ↗

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	The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting. (Redding, 2006) Sam Redding's *The Mega System* is an excellent resource that is a quick, easy read. Formatted as a short handbook, it provides an overview of the research on school reform and the challenges associated with it. It recognizes what most educators already know, that educational systems are complex. This book describes a framework for thinking about improvement from a systems theory perspective that makes sense. It was a precursor to what we know in Idaho as the WISE Tool and forms much of the foundation for the process behind it. If you want a quick book study for your leadership team to spark a conversation about systems improvement, consider this as an option. Available for free download from the author at http://www.centerii.org/survey/.

The Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement (Walberg, 2007)

*The Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement* is the sequel to The Mega System. It contains the research perspective and indicators that ultimately found their way into the WISE Tool and its Wise Ways research briefs. If you are looking for a more comprehensive summary of research that ties all of the systems thinking behind the WISE Tool together, consider this book. Available for free download from the author at http://www.centerii.org/survey/.
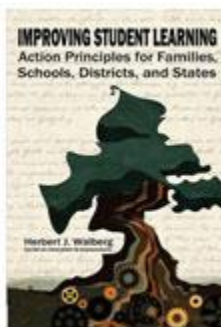
Improving Student Learning: Action Principles for Families, Schools, Districts, and States (Walberg, 2011)

Walberg provides a number of thought provoking ideas for consideration at all levels of the system ? schools and their families, districts, and states. It focuses on key moving parts that impact learning of which educational leaders should be keenly aware and upon which they should take action. Available for free download from the author at http://www.centerii.org/survey/.
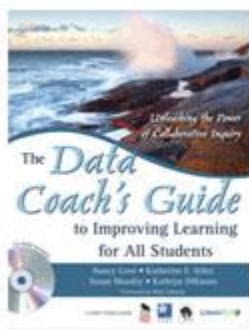
The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students: Unleashing the Power of Collaborative Inquiry (Love, Stiles, Mundry, DiRanna, & Johnson, 2008)

The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students is an in depth resource for using collaborative inquiry to examine multiple sources of data in order to meet students' needs. The guide is intended to assist leaders in changing the culture of schools to break the norm of being "data rich, but information poor" in order to become expert users of student outcome data. Consider reading this book if you have a team that is interested in deepening the conversation about student assessment and responsiveness to learning.

Response to Intervention-Idaho: Connecting the Pieces

The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework is one of the most promising practices in terms of system-wide improvement. RTI is a systemic approach to meeting the needs of all learners by utilizing screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and a multi-tiered prevention system. The state guidance document, Response to Intervention-Idaho: Connecting the Pieces, is a great introduction to RTI. More resources about RTI can be found both on the Idaho RTI website and the National RTI website.

Resources for Decision Making

To obtain success for all students, the effective superintendents view themselves as responsible for ensuring strong practices in the Instructional Core al of every classroom. When they make adjustments and decisions in response to the needs within their system, they do so in light of what they believe constitutes good teaching and learning, building leadership, and other components. Such decisions are based largely on what they learn from research sources (e.g., articles, books, the WISE Tool, institutes, etc.). References to educational and business research findings are often infused seamlessly into their thinking and conversations.

In addition to using research to inform their decisions, the superintendents also intentionally access outside technical assistance partners that support and blend well with their vision for instructional leadership, such as university partnerships and state sponsored programs. Examples of Idaho programs that have been utilized by such leaders are Reading First, the Idaho Building Capacity (IBC) Project, and the Superintendents Network of Support, each of which are or were designed to approach instructional leadership and systemic school improvement. When choosing these types of programs and supports, successful superintendents seem to be very intentional consumers of the available offerings; the programs meet a specific need for which they are looking. Similarly, outside partnerships such as these connect to the larger attribute they generally demonstrate of understanding current educational research and are seen as a support for instructional decision-making that directly impact the system.

Ultimately, effective superintendents want to know what the best practices are, they pursue those practices, and then they implement them in a manner that suites their local context.

Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.
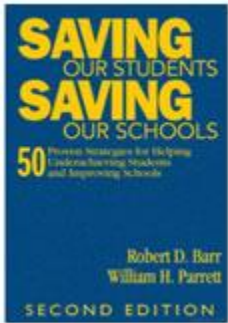
IA05	The district contracts with external service providers for key services in restructured schools.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB03	For each restructuring school, the district makes reference to guidance from What Works When regarding how to assess what the best restructuring options are given its unique district and school context.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗
IB07	The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include research-based, field-proven programs, practices, and models.	⬆CLICK HERE ↗

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

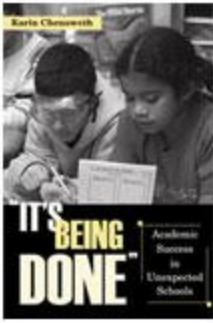| External Technical Assistance Programs	Intended Audience	Links
Idaho Building Capacity (IBC) Project	District and School administrators and their leadership teams who are interested in being coached for systemic improvement	Link
Superintendents Network of Support	Superintendents interested in Instructional Leadership	Link
Principals Academy of Leadership	Principals interested in Instructional Leadership	Link
RTI Module Training	District leadership teams interested in collectively learning about Response to Intervention (RTI)	Link

Places to Begin in the Research Literature:

Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools: 50 Proven Strategies for Helping Underachieving Students and Improving Schools (Barr & Parrett, 2008)

In addition to the other sources mentioned in these resource pages for superintendents, *Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools* describes a vast number of strategies for improving outcomes in school systems. Consider reading this book if you are looking for a research based list of ideas.

This book is co-authored by Dr. Bill Parrett of the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies at BSU. Dr. Parrett is engaged in many partnerships throughout Idaho that are helping our schools and districts.

"It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools" (Chenoweth, 2007)

This is a perfect book for superintendents who want to overcome the mythical phrase common in some places: "You don?t know our students; they have it too difficult to succeed." Based on a nationwide sample of case studies, this book shows how schools of all shapes and sizes have overcome tremendous hurdles to improve outcomes for all children. *It's Being Done* even highlights the story of Lapwai Elementary School in Idaho. From major metropolitan areas to rural Idaho, this book is an excellent read to show that large scale improvement is truly possible.
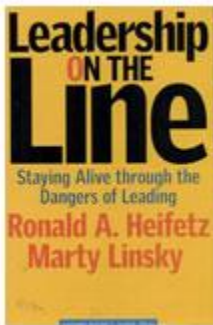
Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002)

Taken from the Harvard Business School, this book on leadership is a critical resource that would benefit all superintendents. Leadership, whether in the business or public service sectors, is challenging. Leaders need to be savvy, skilled, and aware of the ways in which they lead. Consider reading this book if you want to sharpen the way in which you think about leadership.

High Expectations

It is often noted that high performing schools have high expectations of their students (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). An interesting extension of this seems to be that high performing superintendents have high expectations not only for all the students in their district; they also have high expectations of every teacher and principal. They expect teachers to implement strong practices in the Instructional Core (Elmore, 2008), they provide opportunity to improve, and they correct them when necessary through the monitoring of teaching and learning. However, this invariably comes through an expectation of effective leadership from their principals. Adept superintendents expect their principals to be the instructional leader in each building who monitors and ensures high quality work from every staff member. Such effective leadership traits seem to be distilled down to two primary things.

First and foremost, impactful superintendents expect their principals to conduct meaningful classroom observations for the sake of ensuring high quality practices in the Instructional Core. It's considered a very high priority for principals to know how to structure their time in order to do meaningful classroom observations. However, observation alone is not enough. A principal's ability to understand and evaluate the impact the Instructional Core has on student learning data is held as equally important, because the data is seen as a tool that links back to decisions about what needs to be adjusted. Therefore, because effective building leadership is an expectation that high performing superintendents have, a natural question is: What happens when it isn't there? The types of superintendents who overcome the odds make it a priority to have the hard conversations necessary. This is in an attempt to fix the principal's leadership attributes and obtain the characteristics that they would like to see. However, when hard conversations don't get the desired results, they make no excuses and remove the leader.

Because of the fact that they want all students to succeed, results oriented superintendents place high expectations on their staff, especially building principals. These expectations center on the quality of the Instructional Core, and principals are expected to work with teachers to monitor and adjust as indicated by data. When principals do not live up to this, such leaders will try to first work with the principal in question, but, when push comes to shove, they are not afraid to cut their losses, move on, and change personnel in order to better serve students.

Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA07	The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets.	⬧CLICK HERE ↗

IA09	The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IA12	The district intervenes early when a school is not making adequate progress.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IB09	The district ensures that an empowered change agent (typically the principal) is appointed to head each restructuring school.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IB10	In restructuring schools, the district ensures that the change agent (typically the principal) is skilled in motivating staff and the community, communicating clear expectations, and focusing on improved student learning.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IB12	The district is prepared for setbacks, resistance, and obstacles on the path to substantial improvement.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IC01	The school reports and documents its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent reports the school's progress to the school board.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IC02	The district designates a central office contact person for the school, and that person maintains close communication with the school and an interest in its progress.	CLICK HERE ⬈
IC03	District and school decision makers meet at least twice a month to discuss the school's progress.	CLICK HERE ⬈

The resources below are provided for further exploration of this topic. They are among many tools and readings that Idaho School Superintendents have either used or cited in their work.

Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning (Schmoker, 2006)

In the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (2004) said, "If you put good people in bad systems, you get bad results." Mike Schmoker applies this to education and argues that if you put a good teacher up against a bad system, the system will win every time. For superintendents who are focused on results paired with high expectations of building leadership, this book will challenge conventional thinking and practice. It represents a call for leaders to rethink instructional leadership and raise expectations for how their systems operate.
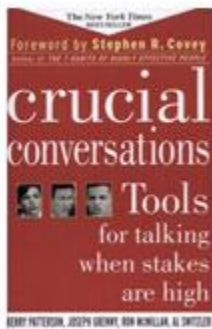
Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High (Patterson, 2002)

Crucial Conversations is often cited by leaders as a powerful tool that helped them frame tough conversations that they have needed to have with others. In order to achieve higher results, change must happen. Change often comes with resistance that is either passive or active. If you struggle having the tough conversations, consider looking to this resource.
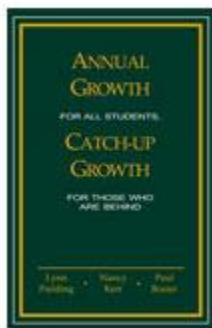
Annual Growth for All Students, Catch-Up Growth for Those Who are Behind (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007)

Stemming from the results achieved in the Kennewick School District in Washington State, this book outlines how one district set a policy of "no excuses" and raised the bar of expectations for instructional leadership. Consider reading this book if you want to learn about a real life story of district wide improvement that balanced top-down goal setting with bottom-up planning.

Principals Academy of Leadership

The state sponsors a support program called the Principals Academy of Leadership (PALs). This program has recently been renamed the Idaho Principals Network (IPN). With a focus on instructional leadership, PALs targets the highly effective characteristics that superintendents are looking for in building leaders: effective observation of system-wide practices, data analysis, and decision-making that ties everything together.

Deeper Moral Purpose

It is easy to wonder what motivates superintendents who overcome challenging odds and accomplish large scale improvement among their system and its students. The work is challenging, to be sure. Especially considering the hard conversations and difficult decisions they face, why do they do what they do? The answer to this seems to be based in a particular belief structure. It comes down to the fact that, while superintendents view the work of continuous improvement to be a collective endeavor, those that are effective actually balance that with a sense of individual responsibility. In other words, they take the successes and failures of their districts as a personal reflection on their own leadership. As such, the drive that each superintendent demonstrates is based in both a sense of responsibility for the success of their system and also on a deeper moral purpose or what might be called the greater good. They view successes and failures in their system very personally.

It is this internal sense of purpose that in turn leads them to make the difficult decisions and have the hard conversations that are necessary to ensure that their principals and each school go back, evaluate what was done, and work to continuously improve. What may make the difference between these leaders and less effective ones is that they harness that deeper moral purpose as a motivator for themselves. Yet, as Fullan (2007) also pointed out:
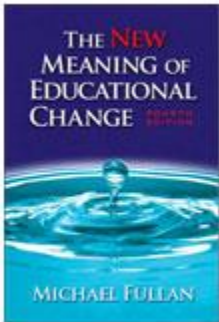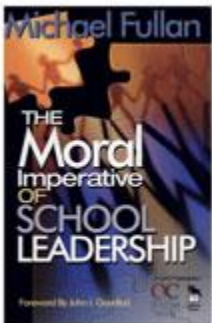
The key, then, [to "reframing change"] is how to help people feel and be better. If feelings and emotions are the key factors, one would think that an appeal to moral purpose in situations of terrible failure would be a great motivator. Not so. Even in extremely difficult circumstances, moral purpose by itself is insufficient. One also must feel and see that there is a means of moving forward. (p.43)

It seems, then, that the effective superintendents have this deeper moral purpose. And, while not sufficient in and of itself, together with other actions they take, the deeper moral purpose motivates their workforce because they as leaders help people see a means for moving forward by connecting to research, following through on high expectations, and using the many other mechanisms that they put in place in order to succeed.

Connections & Resources

The following indicators in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA09	The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.	⏷CLICK HERE ↗
IB11	The district ensures that school improvement and	⏷CLICK HERE ↗

	restructuring plans include "quick wins," early successes in improvement.	

	The New Meaning of Educational Change (Fullan, 2007) In The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fullan explores a number of topics related to systemic reform. In part of the book, he discusses moral purpose as a motivator for change within the larger framework of improvement. In subsequent writings, Fullan has expounded on the idea of moral purpose and how it is at the heart of those who are "change leaders" in school systems. For more information on Change Leaders, Moral Purpose Writ Large, or other related topics, visit Michael Fullan's website at the Center for Development and Learning.
	The Moral Imperative of School Leadership (Fullan, 2003) In another book, specifically on the topic, Michael Fullan delves into *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*. If you are interested in how an inner sense of responsibility and accountability can play a part in impacting the culture and context of schools and districts, consider reading this book. For further reading in the same vein, consider looking up writings by Fullan and his colleague Andy Hargreaves in the "What's Worth Fighting For?" trilogy.

The Superintendent's Political Balancing Act

Many superintendents who achieve improvement at scale view themselves as the primary person responsible in their district for mediating or balancing things that impact their district's ability to improve, but which are outside of their locus of control. Superintendents believe that stewardship and an appropriate amount of financial resources are absolutely critical to the improvement of their system. However, school districts are governed within a federal system, in which the power to govern is divided up among local, state, and national domains. Thus, because their districts' financial resources are influenced by local, state, and federal agencies (and by extension the politics and programmatic decisions at those levels), they see themselves in roles that can be described as political. This in large part relates back to financial resources because they find themselves needing to advocate (to extent permitted by law) for more or adequate funding in order to improve various aspects of the system. Advocating in this way can occur either at the local level (e.g., bonds and levies) or the state level (e.g., the state legislature's budget). Without this political advocacy, they believe the work of improvement would be hindered for lack of resources. On the one hand, political success, such as that achieved by getting a bond or levy passed, is seen as approval by the community and support for the work that is being done. On the other hand, the politics represent a dilemma, especially in relation to the state domain where the largest portions of the districts? budgets are set via formula allocations.

Therefore, higher performing superintendents often see themselves as responsible for advocating and educating the political agencies that directly impact their ability to serve students. This includes meeting informally with state senators and representatives on their personal time, inviting civic and state leaders to their local school board meetings or other events, and working with representatives from the community to educate them on the impact of various decisions at the state and local level. And, while one might contend that the need for such activities is amplified during economic downturns, it would seem to be just as important during normal economic conditions. Either way, the superintendents will oftentimes have to negotiate balance in the realm of politics, especially as it relates to financial resources. This political balancing act is critical to their district?s ability to succeed for it impacts the ability to broker the right kinds of resources for the decisions that are made.

Connections & Resources

The following indicator in the WISE Tool (Idaho's online planning tool) would make for natural connections for superintendents who are considering making plans related to this topic.

IA01	The district includes municipal and civic leaders in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.	⬈CLICK HERE ↗

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